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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000097

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)  
SUBJECT: GUINEA/SIERRA LEONE BORDER VISIT ILLUSTRATES DAILY  
SECURITY CHALLENGES

REF: CONAKRY 0090

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Recent Embassy trips to Guinea's border with Sierra Leone, both in the south and in the north, demonstrate just how porous Guinea's borders are. On Guinea's southern border, using little more than handwritten ledgers to track people, Guinean border officials could not provide figures as to the number of people crossing the border every day. Despite calls for increased vigilance by the local senior government official, border authorities appeared ill equipped to effectively address basic immigration issues, let alone the daily challenges of drugs or trafficking in persons. At an isolated outpost on Guinea's northern border, Guinean soldiers enforce their illegal claim to a slice of Sierra Leone. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On January 30, a team of four Embassy officials, including Poloff and Deputy RSO, traveled three hours from the capital to the border town of Pamelap. The route serves as the primary entry point into Sierra Leone from the southern part of Guinea. The Embassy delegation was accompanied by Mme Marie Guilavogui, the prefect of Forecariah, and by the local police commissioner.

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JUST A FEW MORE KILOMETERS...  
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¶3. (SBU) The town of Pamelap is located within the prefecture of Forecariah, which according to the prefect, includes more than ten different border crossing points, a number of which are simple footpaths. Although the border is just a few kilometers from the prefectural seat, it took nearly an hour to get there, which included more than 30 minutes over a very bumpy dirt road. The town itself is in poor condition, worse off than many of Guinea's underdeveloped villages. The prefect explained that significant fighting took place in the town during the war in Sierra Leone, which was precipitated by rebel forces spilling over into Guinea. She pointed out numerous buildings that had been destroyed or stood in ruins, as well as several shallow craters reportedly caused by grenades. The prefect noted that several years later, the town has not recovered from the violence and destruction.

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TOLERANCE ZERO!  
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¶4. (SBU) Upon arrival in the center of Pamelap, the Embassy delegation was received by a large gathering of local

villagers. The prefect used the opportunity to deliver a well-honed message advocating for increased vigilance on Guinea's borders. A strong proponent of anti-trafficking measures (reftel), the prefect told the gathered crowd that they were the first line of defense in preventing child trafficking. She noted that their vigilance had resulted in several arrests and encouraged them to continue with their efforts. At one point, she had them chant repeatedly (in reference to child trafficking) tolerance ) zero!, Poloff also made a brief speech applauding the prefecture's efforts and affirming that trafficking in persons, and human rights in general, are fundamental priorities of the U.S. Government.

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MAINTAINING THE LEDGERS  
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15. (SBU) The delegation then proceeded to the border facilities, which included a handful of tidy, but small concrete buildings. A group of about a dozen security forces greeted the delegation and thanked the U.S. Government for its military assistance programs over the years. They also asked for additional assistance, noting that they did not even have vehicles or adequate facilities to ensure proper border security.

16. (SBU) At the customs and immigration facilities, officials demonstrated procedures for processing travelers. The immigration agent showed off six large, black ledger books sitting on his desk which he said were used to track various categories of travelers, including passport holders, ECOWAS card holders, laissez-passers, etcetera. He showed

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how each traveler was entered manually into the book. When asked how many people cross the border on an average day, he looked confused. He opened one book and said well, we have had 45 passport holders so far today., His boss, the official in charge of both customs and immigration, did not have an answer either.

17. (SBU) Poloff asked whether the agents had seen any drug trafficking. The senior official immediately said no while the prefect simultaneously said yes. The border official then demurred and said that maybe drugs were passing through elsewhere, but she had not seen any. The prefect noted that she had just incinerated more than 20 kilos herself the previous day. The border officials then said that many people cross the border at other entry points, often by motorcycle, and that it is difficult to keep track of them and what they are transporting.

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THE PARROT'S BEAK  
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18. (SBU) The USAID Director also recently made a brief trip to the Sierra Leone border, near Nongoa, where Guinea's Forest Region juts out into the northern part of Sierra Leone, an area defined by the Makona River. The region, around what is commonly referred to as the Parrot's Beak, witnessed heavy fighting between RUF forces and Nigerian/ECOWAS forces over several months during the war in Sierra Leone, leaving still visible evidence of violence. International borders mean little to the local residents who belong to the Kissi ethnic group near the convergence of the borders of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. A small contingent of Guinean troops are encamped on a hill on the Sierra Leonian side of the border, looking over at the Guinean market town of Nongoa. There is no border post near the Sierra Leonian side of the river, perhaps because the border is allegedly disputed, but a Guinean tank could be seen sitting in the soldier's encampment at the top of the hill. The river is easily traversed by small boats which are poled across by African gondoliers, although a small ferry

operates when water levels are high.

¶9. (SBU) The Guinean soldiers reportedly farm nearby fields, which originally belonged to the village of Yenga that the Guineans are said to have burnt at some point in order to prevent Sierra Leonians from spying on the troops. According to local residents, the Guinean troops will often beat up locals who pass by their hill and look or point in their direction. Photographs are out of the question. The soldiers also sometimes reportedly raid neighboring Koindu in Sierra Leone, and this is said to stifle commercial activity in the once thriving market town. Contacts said that the soldiers have been there for years with no real effort on the part of either the Guinean Government or the Sierra Leonian Government to force them out. The issue reportedly gets virtually no press coverage. USAID staff from Freetown who crossed over to Nongoa reported that it took the Guinean authorities a long time to simply locate the logbook used to record the names of visitors and that it obviously gets very little use.

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (SBU) The southern border crossing looked like an isolated outpost in the middle of nowhere. Compared to other West African border crossings, such as Nigeria/Benin or Ghana/Togo, there was very little activity. The road itself was difficult, but the prefect said that it was the main crossing point and one of the few places where heavy transport crosses over into Sierra Leone. Border officials appeared to have no idea of how much traffic was actually crossing, saying only that it was generally busy., Immigration tracking mechanisms were rudimentary and even if computers were available, they would likely have difficulty supplying them with steady power. The officials spent time discussing how they turn away people with improper documentation, but it was not difficult to imagine those people simply walking a half mile down the road and then crossing where there was no entry point. Although the prefect continues to encourage officials to remain vigilant, especially with respect to child trafficking, the border

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remains porous. If Pamelap is any example, Guinea's borders are basically a sieve ) a few holes get plugged up, but there are plenty of holes left for those forced to reroute.  
END COMMENT.  
CARTER